

# Ethics Consultation

## Beyond the Basics



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
National Center for Ethics in Health Care

# Module 1

Managing Common  
Misconceptions about the Role  
of an Ethics Consultant

# Learning Objectives

- Identify common misconceptions about the role of ethics consultants.
- Describe skills that ethics consultants need to manage misconceptions.
- Practice techniques to manage misconceptions.

# CASES Link



## ***CLARIFY* the Consultation Request**

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Characterize the type of consultation request

Obtain preliminary information from the requester

**Establish realistic expectations about the consultation process**

Formulate the ethics question

# Common Misconceptions about the Ethics Consultant's Role

**It is a **misconception** that an ethics consultant will:**

- Investigate an allegation of serious misconduct.
- Rubber stamp what the health care team wants or what the patient/family wants.
- Clean up a “mess.”
- Conduct a medical evaluation.
- Make a treatment plan.
- Tell the requester what is legal.

# Common Misconceptions about the Ethics Consultant's Role

It is a **misconception** that an ethics consultant will:

- Tell the requester what to do.
- Talk to the family (or other party) so that the provider doesn't have to.
- Take the decision out of the hands of the family (or staff).
- Never report anything to authorities.

# Common Misconceptions about the Ethics Consultant's Role

It is a **misconception** that an ethics consultant will:

- Tell someone he or she is being unethical.
- Get the patient, doctor, nurse, or family to see things the requester's way.

# Skills

## **The ethics consultant should:**

- Listen well.
- Demonstrate empathy.
- Use non-verbal behaviors to enhance communication.
- Explain the ethics consultation process.
- Emphasize how you can be of service.
- Remain neutral.



# Skills

## **The ethics consultant should:**

- Obtain agreement on how to proceed.
- Close the conversation with an invitation.

# What Is an Ethics Consultant's Role?

## To implement the **CASES** approach:

- **C**larify the consultation request.
- **A**ssemble the relevant information.
- **S**ynthesize the information.
- **E**xplain the synthesis.
- **S**upport the consultation process.

# Group Activity Instructions

## Handouts 1.1 and 1.2

1. Break into groups of 3.
2. Review activity instructions and fill in names on the table.
3. Prepare for your role in the scenario (1 minute) and do the role-play (4 minutes).
4. Debrief the scenario (4 minutes).
5. Go to the next role-play, and play the next role you are assigned on the table, and continue as before.

# Discussion

- How did playing these roles differ from what you are used to doing as a consultant?
- How did awareness of the misconceptions change your approach to the scenarios?
- How will this experience affect your future consultations?
- What tips did you learn from your colleagues?

# Takeaways

Managing common misconceptions about the role of an ethics consultant

- 12 common misconceptions  
(An ethics consultant will investigate an allegation of serious misconduct, clean up a “mess,” conduct a medical evaluation, etc.)
- 8 communication skills  
(Listen well, demonstrate empathy, remain neutral, etc.)
- Practice identifying and managing misconceptions

# Questions

# Questions?